

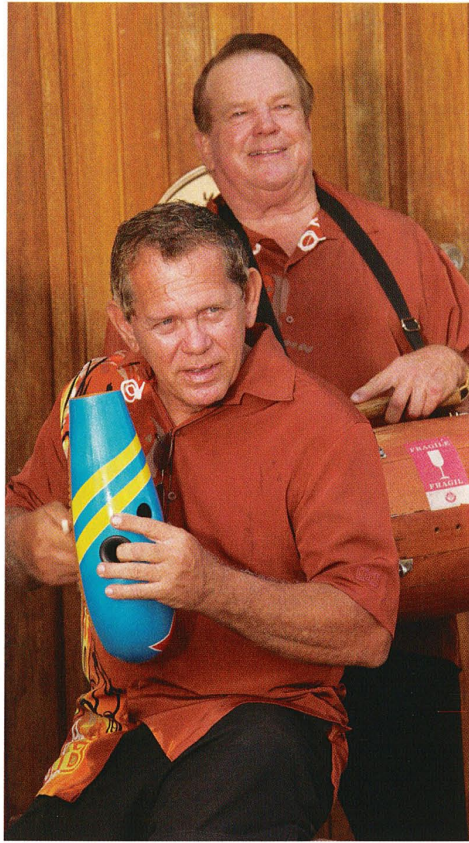


Spreading **ALEGRIA** throughout the Land

Photography by Steve Keith
Text by Rona Coster

Grupo Di Betico is a potpourri of local musicians that finds its roots in the area of the island known as Santa Cruz. Coming together decades ago, at a time when music's simple purpose was to entertain neighbors and friends and to bring families together, folks would gather at the home of group founder Francisco "Panchico" Croes and his wife, Maria Luisa "Mimita" Croes Lopez, for impromptu performances.

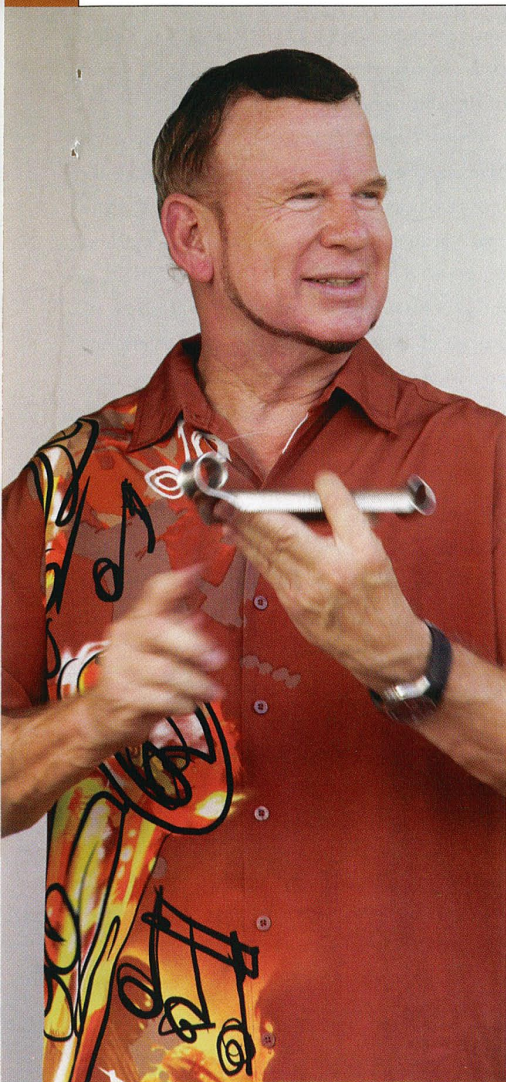
Spreading alegria, or joy, was the genesis of the group's mission. In the early 1960s, the group established its presence on the island, particularly in the month of December, participating in the year-end Paranda, an Aruban tradition where the old year is ushered out in music and song, and Dande, when blessings and wishes for prosperity, health, and joy for the coming year are set to music, and are per-



sonalized by wandering bands of singers and musicians, who tailor the song to also include the names of those being blessed.

Betico Croes, beloved son of Francisco and Maria, and considered the island's visionary—the man who helped conceive and realize Aruba's status aparte within the Dutch kingdom, was a school teacher who played the accordion for the group, or the *sonfonia di man*, as it is known on the island. As a result of Betico's eventual foray into politics and popular appeal, the group ventured out of its native village to include more neighborhoods during the year-end round of Paranda and Dande blessings.

Aruba loves its musical traditions and cherishes what Grupo di Betico represents, namely genuine folkloric roots and the infinite love of indigenous, regional music. In recent years the group's musical repertory has expanded under the direction of third-generation member Hildward Croes, who is a vocalist and an amazing accordion player, as well as composer and arranger, and the group's musical director. As a professional musician, Hildward is a recognized talent in Caribbean musical circles, propelling the group's skills to the next level, but never



**Aruba loves
its musical traditions
and cherishes what
Grupo di Betico
represents, namely
genuine folkloric roots
and the infinite love
of indigenous,
regional music.**

taking away from the small town, backyard Santa Cruz appeal that thrives on contagious rhythms, harmonious melody, and the all-male voice ensemble.

In today's version of Grupo Di Betico, you will find a cross-section of Aruban business and commerce, and even government, playing traditional instruments and evoking pure joy with their charming renditions of new and old compositions.

Band members include: Tommy Croes, lead vocalist, electric cuatro, and retired high school teacher; Gos Oduber, vocalist, bass guitar, composer, and director of the BIE, intellectual ownership bureau; Rgo Oduber, vocalist, guitar, and welding shop owner; Maikito Croes, vocalist, conga, and government official at the education department; Hildward Croes, vocalist, accordion, composer and arranger, group musical director, and professional musician; Maiky Croes, vocalist, percussion/mara-





ca, retired; Rudy Croes, vocalist, percussion/wiri, and the island's Minister of Justice; Leoncio Croes, vocalist, acoustic guitar, composer, group director, and government official for the Aruba Tourism Authority; Dennis Oduber, vocalist, percussion, and welding shop owner; Aiky Croes, vocalist, percussion, tambor, and gasoline station owner; Rudney Lopez, vocalist,

percussion, tambor, and government official at P&O, Personal Organization; Ruben Werleman, vocalist, electric cuatro, and high school director in San Nicolaas.

The bands CDs include *Paranda Arubiano*, *Tradicion*, *Alegria*, and *Libertad*, available in local music stores. Check them out on line at <http://grupodibetico.com/>. **T**